

was extraordinary, both in the sheer volume of legislation that he sponsored and in the dedication that he displayed to improving the education and health of all Americans. Happy birthday to my friend and colleague, Senator TED KENNEDY. Because of you, so many millions of Americans are much better off.●

#### NATIONAL PEACE CORPS WEEK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to take a few minutes, during National Peace Corps Week, to salute the dedication and accomplishments of the hundreds of thousands of Peace Corps volunteers who have served our Nation and the world since President John F. Kennedy had the wisdom and foresight to establish the Peace Corps in 1961.

I want to recognize in particular the 309 current Peace Corps volunteers from Illinois who are today serving in every corner of the globe, as well as the more than 7,000 Illinoisans who have served since the Peace Corps' inception. These men and women come from big cities and small towns, urban centers and rural farming communities. Some are recent college graduates who fit our most common image of a Peace Corps volunteer, while others are older and bring to this new role a lifetime of skills and experience.

Diverse though their backgrounds might be, all Peace Corps volunteers share a common desire to improve the lives of people less fortunate than themselves, and to do so in a direct, hands-on fashion.

Americans are the most generous people in the world. We give from our wallets and we give of our time, donating both of these in large quantities on behalf of the poor, the hungry, and the disenfranchised. Volunteerism and altruism are among the most fundamental aspects of our national character, and all Americans should be proud of our contributions to meeting the world's development challenges.

Yet there is something different, something unique, about those of our fellow citizens who have chosen the Peace Corps path. They move to the other side of the planet, with few to no amenities, and immerse themselves in completely unfamiliar cultures and languages. That type of commitment changes the lives of the local communities in which the volunteers live and work, to be sure. But it also affects profoundly the volunteers themselves, who sacrifice material comforts and proximity to family and friends in exchange for the knowledge that they are having a positive impact.

Sometimes, a Peace Corps volunteer's sacrifice goes far beyond the mere material. This past December, 25-year-old Blythe Ann O'Sullivan of Bloomingdale, IL, died while serving in Suriname. Blythe was a graduate of Bradley University in Peoria and was in her second year volunteering as a small business adviser at the time of her death. I join her family, friends,

the Peace Corps community and all the people whose lives Blythe touched, not only in mourning her loss but also in celebrating her memory.

I would also like to honor the many Illinois colleges and universities that turn out Peace Corps volunteers in large numbers. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ranked 16th in the Nation last year among large colleges and universities in the number of alumni volunteers. Northwestern University ranked 12th among medium-sized schools, and the University of Chicago, I am proud to say, was first in the country among smaller institutions. It is a testament to these universities, their faculties, and most of all their students that so many Illinois alumni choose to join the Peace Corps and serve their country and humanity in this way.

You know, most people hear the words "Peace Corps" and picture young American men and women helping the people of some remote village to dig a latrine or a well, or learn English, or access better health care. And of course, this sort of development work is the principal reason the Peace Corps was founded.

But Peace Corps volunteers also serve an equally important role as goodwill ambassadors. They are often the first Americans their overseas friends and neighbors have ever met, and first impressions count for a lot. Over the past several years, much of the world has questioned U.S. intentions and watched us warily until they've been sure of the real meaning behind our words, the real goals behind our actions. The pure altruism of Peace Corps volunteers, living and working every day with citizens the world over, goes a long way toward reassuring the world that Americans are a good and giving people.

The Peace Corps and its volunteers cannot do this alone. It is important that Congress continue to support the Peace Corps to the greatest possible extent. As a member of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on the State Department and Foreign Operations, I am proud that Chairman LEAHY was able to increase the Peace Corps' budget by \$10 million for fiscal year 2008. And I am certain that together we will be able to continue supporting the Peace Corps to make it even more effective and to honor the dedication and sacrifice of the many thousands of volunteers who have served, are now serving, and will serve in the future.

#### WHITE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I wish to speak briefly about an important issue in my State that involves one of our country's great natural treasures, the White Mountain National Forest. Encompassing nearly 800,000 acres and drawing more than 6 million visitors each year, the White Mountain Na-

tional Forest is not just a place for skiing, hiking, snowmobiling, or timber harvesting; it is a source of pride for New Hampshire. And considering its relatively large footprint in our State, how this special place is managed by the U.S. Forest Service matters a lot.

Fortunately, the Forest Service especially Forest Supervisor Tom Wagner has done a great job in overseeing the White Mountain National Forest. Starting in 1997 when the new forest management plan was being developed, the agency made a concerted effort to reach out to the public, welcomed outside comments, and was sensitive to the sometimes competing views of interested parties. This planning process was not an easy task. Forest management is about addressing multiple uses and priorities, and ultimately it should be about compromise. The White Mountain National Forest has long been utilized for a variety of purposes, and any management plan should carefully strike a balance among them while also protecting the forest for future generations.

To come up with a balanced plan, Supervisor Wagner went out of his way to listen to public input and worked closely with government officials, environmental organizations, businesses, and recreation clubs. I met with him during the planning process and was encouraged by his outreach and evenhanded approach.

After years of hard work, Supervisor Wagner and the Forest Service arrived at a forest management plan that achieved general consensus among the major stakeholders and was well received across New Hampshire. I was pleased to support it when the final plan was released in 2005, including working with Senator SUNUNU on legislation implementing its wilderness recommendations. Signed into law in December 2006, this bill designated nearly 35,000 acres of new wilderness in the White Mountain National Forest and was applauded by environmental groups from across the State. I should also note that even our State's logging industry, represented by the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association, supported the wilderness measure out of the spirit of compromise. Clearly, it was not in their business interest to support more wilderness designation, but they did it anyway since it was part of a balanced management plan that also included limited timber harvesting.

Unfortunately, this balance is now under attack, years after the plan was finalized and other elements have been implemented. A few environmental groups based outside New Hampshire have filed a lawsuit against two timber harvesting projects that were part of the 2005 Forest Management Plan. Encompassing less than 1,200 acres, the projects already have been subject to environmental review, would be very limited in scope, and would be carried out over existing road systems. By delaying these projects, this lawsuit is

not only blocking an economic boost for the State and additional revenues for local governments but also blocking the projects' environmental benefits since they would create habitats critical for wildlife management. Well respected environmental groups such as the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Appalachian Mountain Club, and Audubon Society have come out against this legal challenge, and I support their efforts to maintain the consensus approach underlying the 2005 Forest Management Plan.

The White Mountain National Forest can and should be accessible to a wide variety of users, and we have a carefully crafted plan to accommodate them. It is unfortunate that a few groups who had their chance to provide input during the planning process are resorting to litigation to take apart the 2005 Forest Management Plan. Of course, the Forest Service must follow the law and carry out certain environmental reviews, and I defer to the courts to resolve these legal questions. However, I strongly believe that this lawsuit runs counter to New Hampshire's interests and undermines the good will among our State's major stakeholders which has been critical for advancing sound environmental policies. I therefore hope that this legal challenge is resolved as soon as possible and that we can all support the Forest Service's management of the White Mountain National Forest, including its proposed timber harvesting projects.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, unfortunately, history will record February 2008 as a month in which contained six separate high-profile multiple murders by firearms occurred across the country. These shootings occurred in places normally considered safe, including Northern Illinois University, Louisiana Technical College, and a city council meeting inside Kirkwood City Hall. It appears there are few places where the dangers of gun violence can not reach. However, there are some actions we can take to help change this epidemic of gun violence.

In 1993, President Clinton signed the Brady bill into law. This law requires a waiting period for handgun sales until records are available to instantly check criminal background of prospective gun purchasers. After the National Instant Check System, NICS, became operational in 1998, the Justice Department maintained background check records on approved purchases for 6 months to ensure that felons and other prohibited buyers were not mistakenly approved. Under the Bush administration, however, Attorney General John Ashcroft sought to require the destruction of the records of approved purchasers within 24 hours. In July 2002, the Government Accountability Office, GAO, issued a report on the potential effects of next-day destruction of NICS

background check records. They concluded that destroying these records within 24 hours would prevent the government from auditing the NICS system to ensure its accuracy and "would have public safety implications." Despite these GAO warnings, Attorney General Ashcroft decided to implement the 24-hour record destruction provision.

The Brady bill only requires background checks for sales by licensed gun dealers. It does not require them for transfers between unlicensed persons. Approximately 40 percent of all gun sales involve those transfers, such as at gun shows. Only 6 States require background checks on all firearm sales. According to the ATF, almost one-third of trafficked guns are acquired at gun shows and flea markets. These gatherings present the perfect opportunity for unlicensed sellers to offer large numbers of guns for sale with no questions asked. Those who would not pass a background check in a licensed gun store are able to purchase as many guns as they wish at gun shows.

In 1994, President Clinton signed legislation into law that banned the production of certain semiautomatic assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines. Among the banned items was a list of 19 specific weapons as well as a number of other weapons incorporating certain design characteristics such as pistol grips, folding stocks, bayonet mounts, and flash suppressors. The 1994 assault weapons ban prohibited the manufacture of semiautomatic weapons that incorporate at least two of these military features and accept a detachable magazine. In 2004, when the assault weapons ban expired, despite the overwhelming support of the law enforcement community, the ongoing threat of terrorism, and bipartisan support in the Senate. Sadly, the tragedies at both Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University were inflicted by someone using previously banned high capacity ammunition magazines.

On average, 32 people are murdered in this country by firearms every day. By instituting such simple changes in current law, addressing the gun show loophole and passing a new assault weapons ban, we could help reduce the likelihood of such tragedies occurring.

#### 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS INITIATIVE

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I express my support for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, 21st CCLC, initiative, the only Federal funding source dedicated to supporting successful afterschool programs around the country. This program is critical to our children's and our economy's success.

For many American families, it is necessary for both parents to work outside the home, and these families face true challenges in finding affordable childcare services. This is a problem

not only for parents of infants and toddlers too young to go to school, but also for parents of school-age children who would otherwise be left unsupervised in those critical hours between the end of the schoolday and the end of the workday. In Maryland, 25 percent of children in grades K-12 are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. Studies show that millions of children around our Nation are left on their own after school to devastating effects.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have concluded that two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower and higher income youth can be explained by unequal access to out-of-school activities, especially during the summer months. This unequal access creates a gap that begins in elementary school and accumulates over the years. It results in unequal placements in college preparatory tracks and increases the chance that children from low-income families will drop out of high school.

The hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex. Teens who do not participate in afterschool programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes than teens who do participate. They are also three times more likely to engage in risky and self-destructive behaviors.

Parents who have difficulty securing reliable afterschool care miss an average of 8 days of work per year, and studies have shown that decreased worker productivity related to parental concerns about afterschool care costs businesses up to \$300 billion each year.

Recognizing the benefits of quality afterschool activities, Congress created the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, which provides states with grant money to facilitate their efforts to provide children with quality afterschool social, academic, and other enrichment activities. The program's results have been dramatic.

In the 2004-2005 school year, 59 percent of regular attendees attained Federal proficiency levels or better in reading and language arts and 54 percent of regular attendees attained Federal proficiency levels or better in math. Teachers reported that a majority of participating students improved in every category of behavior. The categories with the highest percentages of student improvement were academic performance, completing homework to the teacher's satisfaction, class participation, and turning in homework on time.

A study conducted in Maryland's Anne Arundel County school district revealed that CCLC participants missed fewer days in school and achieved higher proficiency ratings in reading and math. Also, teachers perceived increases in students' overall achievement in school and their confidence in learning. Children attending